BOOK REVIEWS

Wyeth Illustrates the Classics

ABOUT AUTHORS

This Painter Recreates in Color the Scenery of Great Fiction-Drama

"Why don't you speak for yourself, John?"

THE COURTSHIP OF MILES STANDISH. By Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. With an introduction by Ernest W. Longfellow, and with pictures by N. C. Wyeth. Houghton, Mifflin Company.

WESTWARD HO! By Charles Kingsley. Pictures by N. C. Wyeth. Charles Scribner's Sons.

ROBINSON CRUSOE. By Daniel Defoe. Pictures by N. C. Wyeth. Cosmopolitan Book Corporation.

WYETH himself once defined the role of illustrator as accompanist to the author's melody, decorative frame maker to the author's word pictures, creator of a mood in which the reader might best receive the dominant impression of the book. A more popular view is that the illustrator helps the reader's imagination in the effort to recreate the chief characters, the great moments of a work of the imagination. He is an actor who plays on the stage of paper and prints the great roles of literature.

In the three books which he has decorated for this season's delight Wyeth justifies both views. Certainly the picture of Priscilla asking that famous question of John Alden, and that of Crusoe finding the footprint, are something more than stage scenery. Yet if one looks through these impressive volumes he will find that the backgrounds, the accessories are so treated as to leave the reader's exploring mind free to introduce its own conception. There is room in Wyeth's world of color. This is because his own imagination is not limited to any theatrical arrangement of figures. All nature is about his people. In the introduction to the great story by Defoe he writes:

"The outstanding appeal of this fascinating romance to me personally is the remarkably sustained sensation one enjoys of Crusoe's contact with the elements—the sea and the sun, the night and the storms, the sand, rocks, vegetation and animal life. In few books can the reader breathe, live and move with his hero so intensely, so easily and so consistently throughout the narrative. In Robinson Crusoe we have it; here is a story that becomes history, history living and moving, carrying with it irresistibly the compelling motive of a lone man's conquest over what seems to be inexorable fate.

"Do my pictures add a little to the vividness of this story? Do I aid a little in the clearer visualization of Robinson Crusoe as he moves about on his sunny island? That is the most I can hope for."

Ernest W. Longfellow, son of the beloved author of the American classic for which new pictures have been made, writes the introduction:

"I am very glad, as a direct descendant of Priscilla and John Alden, to welcome this new and beautiful edition of the 'Courtship of Miles Standish,' especially timely in this tercentenary year of the Landing of the Pilgrim Fathers.

"Mr. Wyeth's illustrations seem to me—and I doubt not that they would have seemed to my father—admirable all through in their richness of color and their unconventional treatment, coupled with their many evidences of the closest study of the period.

"One has but to look at such a picture as the Sailing Away of the Mayflower, with the Pilgrims gathered on the shore, to feel the

The Footprint.

sinking of heart of the adventurers as the last link connecting them with the land of their birth faded in the distance.

"Whether Mr. Wyeth's conception of Priscilla as a piquant girl of French descent, with black hair and sparkling eyes, coincided with the demure Puritan maiden that was in my father's mind I cannot say. On the historic grounds of her French-Huguenot ancestry, however, Mr. Wyeth is entitled to his conception, and no one can dispute the attractiveness of his Priscilla."

No doubt the subject of Kingsley's book made a strong appeal to the artist. There is no end of suggestion in the England of Elizabeth, the sea where floated the Spanish Armada and the forests of the new world, of which the author of "Westward Ho!" had less material for making his word pictures than has the American artist of to-day. Here is a bit of the text:

"Upward and southward ever; but whither who can tell? They hardly think of the whither, but go like sleep walkers, shaken out of one land of dreams only to find themselves in another and stranger one. All around is fantastic and unearthly; now each man starts as he sees the figures of his fellows, clothed from head to foot in golden filagree; looks up and sees the yellow moonlight through the fronds of the huge tree ferns overhead as through a thicket of enormous flags; now through bamboos forty feet high; now they are stumbling over boulders, waist deep in cushions of club moss; now they are struggling through shrubberies of heaths and rhododendrons and woolly incense trees, where every leaf as they brush past dashes some fresh scent into their faces."

Like "Westward Ho!" in the strangeness of its setting, but sharply contrasted in the unique situation of its lone central figure, is Robinson Crusoe. Here is the famous episode of the footprint illustrated by Wyeth:

"It happened one day, about noon, going towards my boat, I was exceedingly surprised with the print of a man's naked foot on the shore, which was very plain to be seen in the sand. I stood like one thunderstruck, or as if I had seen an apparition. I listened, I looked around me, I could hear nothing, nor see anything. I went up to a rising ground, to look farther. I went up the shore and down the shore, but it was all one; I could see no other impression but that one.

"I went to it again to see if there were any more, and to observe if it might not be my fancy; but there was no room for that, for there was exactly the very print of a foot—toes, heel and every part of a foot. How it came thither I knew not, nor could in the least imagine. But after innumerable fluttering thoughts, like a man perfectly confused and out of myself, I came home to my fortification, not feeling, as we say, the ground I went on, but terrified to the last degree, looking behind me at every two or three steps, mistaking every bush and tree, and fancying every stump at a distance to be a man; nor is it possible to describe how many various shapes affrighted imagination represented things to me, how many wild ideas were found every moment in my fancy, and what strange, unaccountable whimsies came into my thoughts by the way."

"Westward Ho!"

Tree as His Friends Saw Him

HERBERT BEERBOHM TREE: SOME MEMORIES OF HIM AND OF HIS ART. Collected by Max Beerbohm. E. P. Dutton & Co.

The actor's art, carven in the moving marble of his own person, has no immortality save that of memory. But something of the pathos yields to a volume of such memories as these recorded of Tree. Bernard Shaw, Max Beerbohm, the actor's brother; Edmund Gosse, Louis N. Parker, Haddon Chambers, and the subject's wife and daughters are among the authors.

They have really made a book of it. Naturally the view is colored by affection, but the pages are not wasted in mere compliment. Nobody would expect that of Shaw, in any case. Here is part of his experience as author with actor-manager.

"You really could not lodge an indifferent

Tree as Richard II.

fact in his mind. This disability of his was carried to such a degree that he could not remember the passages in a play which did not belong to or bear directly upon his own conception of his own part; even the longest run did not mitigate his surprises when they occurred. Thus he never fell into that commonest fault of the actor: the betrayal to the audience that he knows what his interlocutor is going to say, and is waiting wearily for his cue instead of conversing with him. Tree always seemed to have heard the lines of the other performers for the first time, and even to be a little taken aback by them.

"Let me give an extreme instance of this. In 'Pygmalion' the heroine, in a rage, throws the hero's slippers in his face. When we rehearsed this for the first time, I had taken care to have a very soft pair of velvet slippers provided; for I knew that Mrs. Patrick Campbell was very dexterous, very strong and a dead shot. And, sure enough, when we reached this passage, Tree got the slippers well and truly delivered with unerring aim bang in his face. The effect was appalling. He had totally forgotten that there was any such incident in the play; and it seemed to him that Mrs. Campbell, suddenly giving way to an impulse of diabolical wrath and hatred, had committed an unprovoked and brutal assault on him. The physical impact was nothing; but the wound to his feelings was terrible. He collapsed on the nearest chair, and left me staring in amazement, whilst the entire personnel of the theatre crowded solicitously round him, explaining that the incident was part of the play, and even exhibiting the prompt book to prove their words. But his *morale* was so shattered that it took quite a long time, and a good deal of skilful rallying and coaxing from Mrs. Campbell, before he was in a condition to resume the rehearsal. The worst of it was that as it was quite evident that he would be just as surprised and wounded next time, Mrs. Campbell took care that the slippers should never hit him again, and the incident was consequently one of the least convincing in the performance."

Even in a memorial Shaw could not refrain from this fling:

"One moment he would surprise and delight his courtiers (for that is the nearest word I can find for his staff and entourage) by some stroke of kindness and friendliness. The next he would commit some appalling breach of etiquette by utterly ignoring their functions and privileges, when they had any. It was amiable and modest of him not to know his own place, since it was the highest in the theatre; but it was exasperating of him not to know any one else's. I very soon gave up all expectation of being treated otherwise than as a friend who had dropped in: so, finding myself as free to interfere in the proceedings as any one else who dropped in would apparently have been, I interfered not only in my proper department but in every other as well: and nobody gainsaid me. One day I interfered to such an extent that Tree was moved to a mildly sarcastic remonstrance.

"'I seem to have heard or read somewhere,' he said, 'that plays have actually been produced and performances given in this theatre, under its present management, before you came. According to you that couldn't have happened. How do you account for it?'

"'I can't account for it,' I replied, with the blunt good faith of a desperate man. 'I suppose you put a notice in the papers that a performance will take place at half-past eight, and take the money at the doors. Then you *have* to do the play somehow. There is no other way of accounting for it.'"

Max Beerbohm can be as acid as Shaw when he chooses, but here he writes in the vein of brotherly affection. This is what he has to say of the actor's impressions of America:

"To the magic of New York, on our arrival, he was instantly responsive. He was not the sort of tourist who takes a homemade tuningfork about with him and condemns the discords. He regarded himself not as a responsible judge, but as a quite irresponsible flitter-through. He liked the overheated rooms and the over-iced streets, liked not only the slow, low voices of the New York men, but also the piercing voices of the New York ladies, and also the fabulous expensiveness of cabs, and the manners of street car conductors, and being expected to make a speech after the play's last act but one. Nor was Chicago too grim for him, nor Boston too prim."

The volume includes reprinted papers by Tree from the London *Times* and *Chronicle* and extracts from his notebooks. He used to write down epigrams that came into his head and things he heard which appealed to him—like these:

"Everything comes to him who doesn't wait."

"Of all the arts love is the greatest."

"Flattery gives us winged feet."

"The greatest blunders of the world have been made by common-sense people."

"Never impart your humor to the humorless. They will use it as evidence against you."

And he even recorded with evident appreciation that famous riddle: When is a joke not a joke? Answer: When it's told to an Englishman!

Sargent's Portrait of Tree.

A Playful Work, for Drama Fans

By LOUISE CLOSSER HALE.

Burns Mantle, what staved your soft pencil?

On those occasions when you sought fittingly to describe my interpretation of a role which—in your capacity as dramatic critic—you were obliged to witness, what little fellow down in your subconscious cellar (I always feel it is located in the stomach) substituted patient praise for fierce execration?

Did you know that, in the whirligig of time, you should be compiling a book and I should be criticising it—or did you really like me? Don't answer—it makes no difference. In this excellent volume of "The Best Plays of 1919-20" (Small, Maynard & Co.) you have forestalled invective by insidiously embodying among those plays one which permitted your critic of this column to repaint her bedroom furniture, buy five parchment lamp shades and pay an income tax.

Thoughts for the Drama Club Sonnets as Preparatory Exercise

Not that I wrote it—Oh Lord no! I remember sending one of my novels to James Forbes, who as author of "The Famous Mrs. Fair" is one of the ten best playwrights—for the year. Jimmy and I have one attribute in common: we suffer from insomnia. He is rather proud when he has spent a sleepless night, so I was not at all sorry for him when he wrote: "Darn you, Louise, I was awake all night reading that book and got breakfast out of the ice chest at 5:30—cold brussels sprouts." Then he went on kindly but firmly to say, if I really wanted to know how the book would lend itself to a *play*—and in a short time there was very little of me left. But that little went on making the dramatization just the same. And for Mr. Forbes's edification I will now divulge the letter sent me by the gentleman who was anxious to have the drama for a little dancing favorite:

"To be honest with you, Mrs. Hale" (he scrawled), "it is fierce. It has not got nothing to recommend it, and it is hard to believe that any lady who could write such a nice book could write such a silly play as the play what you have written.

"Hoping that we will remain friends."

Still I bore no malice when I saw "The Famous Mrs. Fair," and was not annoyed over being kept awake. My great fear was that we might not be allowed to remain through the performance, as the odors of the restaurant next door began making themselves felt, and we all knew that if they became intolerable Henry Miller would give us our money back and tell us to go home. For it is Henry's theatre, and as he claims he would not subject his guests in his own big country place to kitchen odors, he certainly will not offend those who visit him in Forty-third street.

We got through safely and I went back to talk to Henry Miller and kiss Blanche Bates—it might have been the other way round, but no matter. I am old enough to do as I please—so's Henry, for that matter. He was no longer a multi-millionaire, which was a relief, as rich people are endurable only on the stage; nor was the heavy air of stardom hanging about. If you want to get the essence of Henry Miller's character don't watch him when he is dominating a situation on the stage, but when some one else is. Then you will see his real talent in the complete effacement of himself for the sake of the lesser light whose scene it is.

To the student of the drama this book is valuable. It gives him a knowledge of the kind of modern dialogue that can best be crystallized into dollars. Students do so like to make money. I met one recently who for years had snorted at popular successes. But at last a play of his had scored a hit and he was bellowing about the indecency of the luxury tax. Clubs around the country, those intent upon doing something or other to the drama, will find, as I have, qualities in these plays that may have impressed no one else. Ladies, if you will give me your discoveries I will give you mine!

Par example, in "Beyond the Horizon" (that tragedy with the splendid actress in the chair) we meet three people who did not follow their natural destinies, destinies that were plainly enough outlined had passion not stood blinding them with the beating wings of hate and desire. And not only they but those around them suffered from the twisting of the threads. Never say: "I must marry Tom, although I love Dick, as this will be better for Uncle Harry." It won't be better for any of you. Ruthless though it may seem, we must all pick our own course. Young Mr. O'Neill may put down the baby and write a letter from Provincetown to the effect that this was not his idea at all. But don't let it disturb you. A play is for just what you, personally, can get out of it. An author sometimes writes better than he knows. And sometimes he knows (I hope) better than he writes. But that has naught to do with the Drama Superlative.

After this homely tragedy of farm life comes the gleaming drama: "Déclassée." And the Drama Club might stop to muse on the woman author from Missouri who, without being shown, knows the psychological processes of the English aristocracy when she may not be able to define a mountain peak in her own Ozarks. They say poets have imagination, and as Zoe Akins was first a writer of verse, it might not be a bad preparation for the novice to work on a few sonnets. Certainly he would learn form, and that is more than every playwright has a knowledge of. The club might also comment on the new angle she has brought to the business of construction. In "Déclassée" the dramatic incidents take place off the stage; the two games of cards are in the wings, and the scene when the letters are produced evidently occurs when the stage hands are striking the set. We do not see them but we get the reactions on the stage of these three ugly happenings—and the vast sweeping consequences to a very beautiful Lady Helen.

There is good writing in this play, but it is the ease of expression of St. John Irvine's "Jane Clegg" which makes one twist with joy. Look for the description of the characters in italics if you would learn of an author's quality; the style of the characters' dialogue is limited to their own mental capacities. I don't know St. John Irvine—I should like to (they tell me he commented very favorably on the old woman in the wheeled chair) for I want to ask him if his book of "Mrs. Martin's Man" was in his mind when he wrote "Jane Clegg"—if Mrs Martin was trying to make him put her on the stage. Perhaps the idea plagues me (notice I refuse to say intrigue) because they were both great creatures from a new world of thought. It's lovely—isn't it?—the way the great men stick up for the really great women!

Some Plays Make One Laugh Even With Solemn People Present

We must all know that what may make good reading doesn't always make a good play.

Inversely (to get away from me for a moment) what is very funny on the stage is not funny on the printed page. The Drama Club I fancy will not find much to laugh over when they take up "Mamma's Affair." The laughter which greets the play when it is seen on the stage comes from the relation of the lines to the situations. Am I plain? No? Well, it wouldn't be funny to you if I told you I met a woman with a smut on her nose, but if I told you of a woman trying to get up a flirtation while she had a smut on her nose you might be induced to smile. There, that's the best I can do for you!

On the other hand "Wedding Bells" made me laugh out loud when reading it in a bus with solemn people looking at me. I think authors whose plays both read and act well would have been writers had the drama never been invented. After this statement it is painful to admit that I laughed also at "Adam and Eva," although Mr. Middleton has stubbornly expressed himself through the medium of plays ever since he began moving from a hall bedroom to second floor back, to first floor front, and so on till he had the whole house. And it wasn't so many years ago when, at his collaborator's table (which is the collaborator and which the laborator, I wonder?) the host being a nice young architect, Mr. Guy Bolton, registered with me satisfaction and relief over the moderate rent of the apartment house where we both dwelt. How do you suppose that architect got into the theatre anyway—through the scenery room? And if so, why did I foolishly begin in the dressing rooms?

"Clarence" I refuse to discuss. I am going to do a whole article on Booth Tarkington, and it is really too trying anyway to have him do plays and books equally well. But I could not have said that if "Clarence" had not been written. For the Drama Clubs I recommend "Clarence" as a masterpiece of construction. Don't say that is out of the province of a body of students meeting to decide upon what play they had better go see next week. The public will not support a play if the construction is faulty.

"Abraham Lincoln" I still dare to say is not a play. But in London I took out my handkerchief when Lincoln entered the scene, although he was a little fellow with an Irish brogue, and I took it out again and never stopped dabbing when I saw the more complete impersonation over here. Lincoln himself is our nation's great tragedy. His life plays itself. It needs little form, only beauty of expression, as befits high souls. To the English he is at present a cult, but I think it exemplifies most delicately the real worth of these sophisticated people when they make their way to a London suburban theatre, as to a little shrine, to pay their homage to a hero not of their own country. I wish an American could have done the first Lincoln play to be so generally accepted. But there is vision in John Drinkwater's eyes, music in his heart, and we fall in line and march to the swing of his fine prose.

The Lincoln Play Across the Water; The Book Ends With Statistics

There is left "The Jest." It is the only play that ever blotted out before the first act was over the high price I paid for my seat. And yet I was not there. I had left the scum of Broadway and was again travelling a narrow way between the high walls of palaces. I was singing from the heights of Fiesole, following the torches of the masked brothers who pushed their way through Florentine streets with the dead carried high. The women's faces in the audience looked funny, whitely following John Barrymore as he elongated himself about the stage—but he did not hold me. He merely sent me on to Italy.

At times, in Italy, I was with the young adapter of the Italian play who knows its richness through all his fine mind and senses—with Edward Sheldon, who made the translation as a labor of love—our wonder boy who gave us "Salvation Nell" at nineteen, then "The Nigger," and "Romance." His work, I am sure, would have been among these best plays did not the gods give with one hand as they take away with the other. But when the vigor of health comes back to him, what will there not be for us eager ones? Really, I should hate to pay storage on the plots which Edward must have skilfully camouflaged by that nicely brushed black hair of his.

Toward the end of the book comes The Great Exposure—although Mr. Mantle does not call it that. He calls it "Where and When They Were Born" and he gives the ages of some of us who have appeared in the plays of the year. It is our Reward of Merit. The page is one that an actress will instinctively turn to, and then—! Already I have heard mutterings when chance players have picked up my copy. "What is 1876 from 1920?" a woman asks, glaring at her name. I do a little arithmetic here. "What!" Exclamation from her. "Well it's false." Or, looking at mine, "Are you, dear, *really*?" or, more cruelly: "I thought you saw the Chicago fire!" It's nothing to me. My age and my salary are the only things I've ever told the truth about in my whole life, but I did not see the Chicago fire. What gets me is the penchant my women friends who used to be as old as I have for being born in 1880. It's so concerted, somehow!

Following this is another page—the page of our dead within the year—or a little over. Will you all read it, please; give it a gentle moment? Some of you will be surprised. I was, and wondered why I had not known before, or why he had not been missed. "Are we so soon forgotten, then?" asked Rip Van Winkle. We are like old newspapers, read and cast aside—as this little critique will be. I am not so sure that it makes much difference so long as we have served you, ladies and gentlemen, with Ten Best Plays.